



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 17, 2000

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN FLOYD SPENCE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

EUCOM/BALKANS HEARING

Today, the committee continues its review of the fiscal year 2001 defense budget request, focusing on how it addresses the needs of our unified commanders in chief. Our witness this morning is General Wesley K. Clark, Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. European Command, and Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, who will testify on the challenges he faces within his area of responsibility, and in particular, the situation in the Balkans.

Before we begin, I must note that this is likely to be General Clark's last official appearance before this committee as a CINC. In April, General Joseph Ralston, currently serving as the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, will assume General Clark's position. Let me take the opportunity to thank you, General Clark, for your long and distinguished service to this country. Your tenure as commander in chief U.S. European Command and Supreme Allied Commander Europe was indeed historic, as you commanded the combined military forces of the United States and NATO during the alliance's first military campaign. I think I speak for the entire committee in wishing you well in your future endeavors.

When General Clark appeared before the committee last March, the United States and NATO were on the verge of military operations in Kosovo. At that time, I expressed concern that the United States was about to become entangled in a situation that did not directly threaten U.S. vital national security interests and therefore did not warrant the introduction of U.S. ground forces into another open-ended peacekeeping mission.

Since then, that exact scenario has come to pass. The United States and its NATO allies conducted a 78-day air campaign against Yugoslavia, followed by the introduction of U.S. and allied ground forces into Kosovo in a peacekeeping operation that has no set timetable or perceptible exit strategy.

Last year, I noted that declining defense budgets and personnel strength, along with an already demanding pace of operations not only in Bosnia but around the globe, would greatly compound the costs and implications of a long-term Kosovo deployment. One year later, we can quantify those costs and implications.

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According to the Department of Defense's recent Kosovo After Action Report, Operation Allied Force was the equivalent of a major theater war for much of the Air Force, including some key air assets such as tactical aircraft, airlift aircraft, and refueling tankers. The report noted that "The high demand for these aircraft was met by deploying aircraft from the forces assigned to Commanders in Chief of theaters outside Europe." Air Force Chief of Staff General Michael Ryan told this committee that Allied Force was executed at the expense of stateside units whose readiness fell 10 percent in 1999 alone over the previous year. These are the very forces that would have been needed had a major theater conflict erupted in either the Persian Gulf or Korea.

The introduction of ground forces to a peacekeeping operation in Kosovo and the continuing mission in Bosnia has also had a significant negative impact on the Army. Last November, the commanders of the two divisions conducting peacekeeping operations in the Balkans – the 10th Mountain Division in Bosnia and the 1st Infantry Division in Kosovo – both declared their units C-4, the lowest readiness rating possible. While the Army's briefing paper on this matter stated this was strictly a "bookkeeping accountability issue," the fact remains that two of our ten active Army divisions remain engaged in long-term, open-ended peacekeeping operations that detract from their wartime missions. Whether these units would actually be able to disengage from the Balkans to conduct a major theater conflict remains an open question.

How long the United States will remain in the Balkans also remains an open question. While our soldiers, by all accounts, continue to do a superb job in both Bosnia and Kosovo, they are, to quote General Shelton, "just that, soldiers. Soldiers first and foremost." General Shelton also told this committee that he remains "concerned about the continued slow progress in civil implementation in Bosnia and the glacial pace of progress in Kosovo." I share his concerns.

I look forward to receiving an update from General Clark on these matters, as well as the broad array of challenges facing EUCOM today.

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